

Gov. Ryan  
Senate Commerce Committee Testimony  
March 21, 2002

Thank you very much, Senator Rockefeller, Chairman Hollings and the distinguished members of this committee.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to come before you today.

Mr. Chairman, members of this committee came to Chicago early last summer to hold hearings on the state of aviation in Chicago and the Midwest region.

You heard testimony from travelers, tired of the delays getting in and out of O'Hare. You heard from business executives, complaining that business travel was increasingly frustrating.

As you will recall, many members of this committee expressed their own frustrations with the delays at O'Hare and the lack of air service to cities in their home states.

Mr. Chairman, this committee challenged local leaders in Chicago and Illinois to solve the problem of aviation gridlock in Chicago.

You made very clear that unless we fixed the problem ourselves you would impose a solution for us.

But, in the more than 3 years that I have been Governor, Mayor Daley and I have taken on a lot of big problems and worked together to solve them. The mayor worked with me to rebuild the infrastructure of Illinois with a \$12 billion investment program. Mayor Daley has been a great partner with me to ensure we create and retain jobs in Chicago and throughout the state.

So we were ready to work together on the biggest challenge yet, an issue that had eluded previous Mayors and Governors for more than 20 years. We were ready to try to craft a regional aviation plan.

We didn't wait for Washington to step in.

By the time this panel came to Chicago last June, I had already asked the Mayor to present a proposal for expanding O'Hare.

Being one of a handful of Governors with the power to approve or disapprove runway expansion at our state airports, I had sometimes been accused of standing in the way of O'Hare—even though I had never been presented a plan to accept or reject.

But, the members of this committee, perhaps because of the long-running aviation stalemate in Chicago, were skeptical.

Today, I am delighted to report, the Mayor and I did our job. We did everything you wanted.

Our agreement calls for O'Hare's seven runways to be reconfigured from an intersecting configuration to one in which six runways run parallel in an east west configuration. Two cross wind runways remain. The new plan allows for simultaneous arrivals and departures in all weather.

The plan we are bringing to you will almost completely eliminate weather delays at O'Hare. It also ensures O'Hare's continued preeminence as an international hub.

This was the O'Hare plan Mayor Daley got to my desk by July 1.

Because of the importance of this issue, I held hearings throughout the summer so that residents could express their opinions about the O'Hare plan and about the region's other aviation needs.

The hearings were attended by thousands of area residents throughout the Chicagoland area. We also held meetings with local mayors, members of Congress and state legislators.

The meetings and hearings made a strong case for improving O'Hare. Business and labor leaders strongly stated O'Hare's importance to the economy of Illinois and the entire Midwest region.

I heard what you have probably heard, that people were fed up with delays. I

heard about nightmares of cancelled flights that ruined family events or business meetings.

Most troubling, I heard from business leaders that they were no longer expanding their operations in the Chicagoland area because the delays at O'Hare had become intolerable.

I heard about the critical role O'Hare plays in the world's aviation system. Chicago has always been a transportation center, from the first canoe which paddled down the Des Plaines River, to shipping on Lake Michigan; from the railroads to today's jumbo jets. Chicago has always played a central role in moving the goods, services and people of this great country. Today, from O'Hare you can travel to virtually every point across the globe.

When flights are cancelled at O'Hare, flights are cancelled across the country.

The problems at O'Hare were of national concern. In fact, because of its important role as a hub to points across the globe, delays and congestion at O'Hare are of international concern.

So important is our role as an aviation center that I heard again and again about the need to build additional capacity with a new airport in South Suburban Peotone.

In fact, business, labor and community leaders told me we needed both an airport at Peotone and improvements at O'Hare in order to secure our economic and transportation future.

At our hearings, I also heard from residents concerned about their quality of life. In the suburbs near O'Hare they were concerned about noise and air quality from increased air traffic.

In the South Suburbs, where some of the poorest communities in the metropolitan area are located, I heard about their desperate need for economic development.

At every hearing, I heard about the need to keep our economy strong. Whether they were business leaders or union members, they all recognized the important role O'Hare, Midway and Meigs Field play in our region's economy.

The Chicago Airport system is a major economic engine.

To secure our future, we needed to agree to a plan for growth and opportunity.

After the public hearings, I started to work on my counterproposal, one that called for a new airport in Peotone and included substantial parts of Mayor Daley's plan for O'Hare. It also included keeping Meigs Field open.

Then the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> occurred, killing thousands of innocent people.

It has almost become a cliché for people to talk about the lessons learned from that tragic day. But, I think everyone in Washington will agree it highlighted both the vulnerability of our aviation industry and the critical importance of air travel to our economy.

For the first time since the dawn of commercial aviation, our nation's air transportation system was grounded.

Suddenly our airports were empty. So were our hotels and convention halls.

Our economy sputtered, revenues to our state budget dropped off by almost \$800 million as of this month.

I decided that now, more than ever, I needed to work with the Mayor to develop the boldest plan possible.

I had some reservations. I was concerned about the plan for a new south runway in the Mayor's O'Hare plan – which would dislocate some homes and businesses. I was giving that runway a lot of thought.

After the Mayor and I joined President Bush at a rally for the workers of United and American at O'Hare, I visited the control tower.

The controllers took the time to show me the current configuration and how the Mayor's plan would work.

They told me they needed the WHOLE plan proposed by the Mayor for safety

reasons and to increase capacity. That included the southernmost runway.

So, the Mayor and I got to the hard work of negotiating an aviation plan.

Mayor Daley shared my vision that now, more than ever we need to build the air capacity we need for the future. The post September 11<sup>th</sup> slowdown in the economy was no excuse to delay.

It was hard work. But I think we put together a comprehensive package.

I agreed to the entire proposal for O'Hare, to make it modern and efficient.

Once completed it will... reduce weather delays by 95 percent.

More than one day out of ten, O'Hare suffers bad weather and that accounts for most of its delay problems.

The delays at O'Hare slow up everything across the country. If you are trying to fly to Phoenix, Arizona; Columbia, South Carolina; or Clarksburg, West Virginia, you are at the mercy of O'Hare.

I know that has been a major concern of members of this committee and the entire Congress. Not only do you represent the flying public, you are frequent fliers yourselves.

You well know the problem of delays and the inconvenience of not having adequate air service.

Our plan will ensure that you can fly from Chicago to virtually every market across the country and around the globe. An expanded O'Hare, a new airport in Peotone and a renewed Midway Airport will provide ample capacity for growth in air service.

We address the quality of life concerns with this agreement. Any homes and schools located within the 65 day-night noise level near O'Hare during each phase of the construction plan will be soundproofed.

That is a major commitment. It builds upon the efforts by the Mayor over the last several years to address quality of life issues in the communities surrounding O'Hare and Midway airports. By working with commissions made up of local mayors and school district superintendents, the City of Chicago has already soundproofed thousands of homes and scores of schools.

With this agreement we will expand the soundproofing to every home and school impacted by jet noise at O'Hare.

With this agreement, we have certainly addressed the economic development issue.

In addition to the increased air service and reduced delays, this agreement will produce nearly 200,000 jobs and \$20 billion in annual economic impact.

That to me, was the most compelling... reason to make this agreement.

It creates JOBS.

Anyone who tells you otherwise about this project is simply not telling the truth.

This package will keep Illinois residents working.

I would think that every Illinois elected official would support this agreement just for that reason alone—it will create jobs for our residents for many years to come.

We also develop the Peotone Airport, which in the short term will be a key supplemental, airport providing needed additional capacity for the region. In the long run, it will help meet the tremendous increase in demand that the FAA forecasts over the next 11 years.

We believe Peotone can be up and running in five years.

Most importantly it can serve one of the fastest growing areas in the region—Will County.

The Peotone Airport will create thousands of construction jobs and thousands more permanent jobs.

It will be a tremendous shot in the arm to the economy of the South Suburbs, where they are badly in need of economic development.

It will provide convenient air service to South Suburban residents--the 2.5 million people who live within 45 minutes of the proposed site.

And finally, with this agreement, the Mayor has agreed to keep Meigs open until, at

least, 2006. After 2006, the City would need the Illinois General Assembly to pass a law to close the airport and have that signed into law by the Governor.

The City will otherwise keep Meigs open until 2026. That is a major concession by Mayor Daley and I want to commend him for agreeing to that.

The Mayor has had a great vision for his city and takes great pride in the fact that the lakefront is free, open and clear, just as famed city planner Daniel Burnham wished. Miles of lakefront are accessible for all Chicagoland residents, it is part of what makes Chicago a world-class city.

But keeping Meigs open is important to business leaders and aviation enthusiasts. As I heard at the public hearings, it is also important to our region's search and rescue capability and for medical flights. I want to thank the Mayor for agreeing to this aspect of the plan.

Senate Bill 1786 and its companion piece of legislation, House Bill 3479, are being shepherded through Congress by two strong leaders, Senator Richard Durbin, Illinois' senior senator, and in the House, Congressman Bill Lipinski of Chicago.

They have worked extremely hard to round up support for these bills which codify the agreement between the Mayor and me.

I want to thank them for their efforts. They have long called for the Mayor and I to come to an agreement. Both Senator Durbin and Congressman Lipinski fully appreciate the fact that this agreement will create hundreds of thousands of jobs and billions of dollars in economic opportunity.

We have worked closely with them and with your staffs to address concerns and clarify our intent.

For example, both the Mayor and I are strongly in favor of environmental protection. This bill has now been clarified to reflect our desire to have these aviation projects go through the important environmental review process.

We have clarified our continued commitment to the National Environmental Protection Act and the Clean Air Act. We encourage the best practices and the use of technology to mitigate air emissions.

At the same time, we hope to coordinate all of the various reviews and to keep them on track. We believe this can be achieved and we hope the administration and Congress would help.

If the project gets bogged down for some reason, this bill could require the FAA to report to Congress to explain why permits and approvals have not been made. I believe this is important to the members of this committee, Mr. Chairman, just as you urged the Mayor and I to come up with an aviation plan, you can see to it that the plan gets done and gets done right.

We really don't have time to delay. While we have a temporary economic slowdown, it is clear that air travel demand will continue to rise, and rise dramatically.

Last week, the FAA revised its forecasts. Over the next 11 years, the number of air travelers will grow from a peak of 695 million in 2000, to more than a 1 billion by 2013. The time to act is now. With your help, over the next 11 years, we can construct significant portions of the O'Hare plan while Peotone can be up and running. We will be well-positioned to meet demand and serve travelers well.

Mr. Chairman, members of Congress came to Chicago last year and demanded action. We have now delivered everything you wanted.

For years, the aviation debate has been caught in a kind of gridlock.

No one ever wanted to discuss it let alone propose a comprehensive plan such as the one the Mayor and I developed.

One group, the Suburban O'Hare Commission, from whom you have probably heard, has tied the city up in litigation for years over this issue.

They are currently spending hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars on lobbyists, lawyers and image consultants to fight any growth at O'Hare. You have probably heard from them.

What you may not know is that over the past several years, six communities have

abandoned this organization.

It is down to 10 communities and two townships.

By contrast, the O'Hare Noise Compatibility Commission,... works cooperatively with the City of Chicago. It develops a soundproofing plan and spends tens of millions of dollars soundproofing homes and schools... each year. This commission is growing. There are nearly 40 members, mayors and school superintendents.

These community leaders enjoy being at the table with Chicago and working with their colleagues to bring home sound proofing projects and discuss concerns about airport operational issues.

Until the Mayor and I reached this agreement, as we have on several other major economic development projects, the aviation debate was mired in partisan politics.

This bill would prevent future Governors from undoing our agreement. O'Hare expansion has been a politically volatile issue for more than 20 years.

It has been a litmus test for candidates for Governor and the General Assembly.

The small but vocal minority of well-organized opponents have helped to create a stalemate.

In more than 20 years, there has never been a Mayor and a Governor that could agree on an aviation plan. Never.

While there is no chance the Mayor or I will break our agreement in the remainder of my term, I am not running for reelection. It is a very real possibility that future Governors or state legislatures would attempt to undo this agreement.

How can you plan a long-term capital project when it can be stopped at any time because of politics.

This bill would not affect the power of future Governors to make decisions about future airport expansion plans in Illinois.

It merely helps to make our final agreement for O'Hare, Peotone and Meigs truly final.

Mr. Chairman, we have done our job, just as Congress demanded. Now is the time for Congress to act.

Delays and congestion at O'Hare are a national crisis. The strength of the nation's air transportation system is a national priority. Chicago's aviation system affects interstate commerce.

Modernizing O'Hare and developing more capacity with a supplemental airport in the Chicago area are issues of national concern. Our plan is a long-term investment in keeping our nation's aviation system strong. Approving our agreement will well-serve the American people, our air transportation system and this nation's economy.

Thank you.